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Possible Double-brooding in Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
(*Tyrannus forficatus*)

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In a follow-up visit to the site near Alexandria, Thayer Co., where I documented a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher nest with eggs in 2017, I found a pair present at the same site on 8 June 2018. After some searching, I found that their nest, with 4 eggs, was built in the same upright crotch of the same branch where it was located the year before. I knew it was a completely new nest, since the previous nest had been removed after the nesting season the year before.

On a second visit on 13 August 2018, to see if the birds and/or young might still be present, I saw an adult appear and then leave as I approached. I planned to check the nest to learn what I could, but found that no trace remained of the nest. While I was searching the area, a Northern Mockingbird with food in its beak appeared briefly before leaving again. While searching the few scattered, scrubby hackberry trees in the area, I spotted what I thought was the mockingbird nest, just above eye level in a tree about 30 feet from the nest I found on 8 June. I reached up, felt a single chick, and lifted it out to examine it. It turned out to be a stub-tailed Scissor-tailed Flycatcher chick about 10 days old, squawking in protest. To my surprise, it slipped from my hand and fluttered to the ground, as it was still unable to fly. The adult immediately returned and began scolding me. I picked up the chick, snapped a picture of it, and returned it to the nest, where it remained when I left.

Finding an initial nest with the usual clutch of 4 eggs on 8 June, followed 66 days later by a short-tailed nestling about 10 days old on 13 August, and assuming the same pair was responsible for both nests, suggests two options: 1) the first nest failed and the later nest was a second attempt, or 2) the first nest was successful, the pair built another nest, produced a second clutch and was again successful. Although double-brooding by the species is rare, both replacement clutches and double-broods have been documented (Regosin 1998).

The following table shows a typical breeding phenology, beginning with the first visit, and showing the expected length of time for each part of the breeding cycle (Regosin 1998). The table also shows that there is enough time for either option: a replacement clutch or a second brood, to explain what I found. I think this is more likely to be double-brooding by the same pair for several reasons.

1) The 2017 nest and the initial 2018 nest were placed in exactly the same location in the row of a half-dozen scrubby, dying hackberry trees; thus lending credence to it being the same pair of birds.

2) The first nest was built into a very constricted space, making it highly unlikely to be blown out by a storm, and it was shaded by a small leafy twig that had died and lost its leaves since the visit on 8 June 2018.

Date	Activity	Time Elapsed	Earliest Date	Latest Date
8 June 2018	4 eggs			
	Incubation	15 days		
	Hatch date		9 June	22 June
	Nestling stage	15 days		
	Fledge date		24 June	9 July
	2nd nest complete	6 days	30 June	15 July
	2nd clutch complete	5 days	4 July	20 July
	2nd hatch date		19 July	7 August
	2nd fledge date		4 August	22 August
13 August	One 10-day-old chick			

3) The first nest was entirely removed. Not a single bit of it remained in place on 13 August. Total removal suggests it was taken apart and incorporated into the second nest, which was somewhat larger than the first. While I have not witnessed *Tyrannus* sp. re-using material from other nests, I have watched it happen with Pinyon Jay, American Robin, and Cedar Waxwing.

4) The second nest was placed among some leafy twigs that gave shade, same as the first nest.

The above table exhibits the phenology, keeping in mind that any one of the stages may be a bit shorter or longer. In addition, there is no record of the time elapsed between fledging the first brood and initiating the second attempt or a second nest-building, how long the young are fed by the adults, or if the female might begin nest-building while still helping feed the fledglings.

Whichever explanation is correct, it provides information on a species for which little detail has been recorded here in the past.

Editor's Note: Readers are reminded that all native birds and their nests are protected by state and/or federal law. Individuals handling adult birds, nestlings or eggs are required to obtain both state and federal permits. All individuals are encouraged to avoid unnecessarily disturbing or harassing birds, particularly during the breeding season.



Scissor-tailed Flycatcher chick, approximately 10 days old, Thayer Co., 13 August 2018.
Photo by Wayne J. Mollhoff.

Literature cited:

Regosin JV. 1998. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 342 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia (PA).